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500 Indians stranded in Thailand to be brought back

NEW DELHI, OCT 29

Nearly 500 Indians have crossed into Thailand following a crackdown on scam centres in Myanmar, and New Delhi is coordinating with Thai authorities to repatriate them, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Wednesday. Most of the Indians were victims of cyber scam operations based in Myanmar's KK Park complex. Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul confirmed that around 500 Indians are currently in Mae Sot and that India plans to send an aircraft to bring them home once legal formalities are completed. The Indians are among over 1,500 people from 28 countries who fled Myanmar amid the crackdown on transnational cyber fraud networks. In March, India had repatriated 549 nationals rescued from similar scam centres along the border.—*PTI*

I'm doing a trade deal with India: Trump

Says threatened India, Pak with 250% tariffs

SEOUL, 29 OCT

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said Washington is "doing a trade deal with India" as both nations continue negotiations on a proposed trade pact.

Speaking at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO Summit in Gyeongju, South Korea, Trump said he had great "respect and love" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, describing him as "the nicest looking guy". Trump also praised Modi saying "he's a killer, tough as hell".

Trump said he threatened India and Pakistan with 250 per cent tariffs to help spur the resolution of their conflict earlier this year.

Trump's remarks came amid strained ties between New Delhi and Washington following his decision to impose 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods and an additional 25 per cent levy linked to India's purchase of Russian crude oil". External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed the proposed trade pact during their recent meeting in Kuala Lumpur on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit. However, there was no assurance from the US on lifting the tariffs. —*PTI*

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PHOTO: SALAR

ED alleges job scam in TN ahead of 2026 polls

CHENNAI, 29 OCT

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has urged the Tamil Nadu Police to register an FIR over an alleged large-scale recruitment scam in the state's Municipal Administration and Water Supply (MAWS) Department, claiming involvement of politicians. This comes just a few months before Assembly elections due in the state in 2026.

According to ED, around 2,500 candidates were allegedly selected through the recruitment process after paying bribes ranging from Rs 25–35 lakh each. Sources said ED uncovered the alleged scam while probing a separate bank fraud case originally registered by the CBI in April. During searches, investigators seized digital devices containing data on corrupt practices in MAWS recruitment during 2024–25 and 2025–26. The agency has also shared details of about 150 candidates suspected of paying bribes, allegedly routed through cash and hawala channels.

ED has asked the police to initiate a criminal case so it can file a money-laundering case. —*PTI*

MURMU FLIES HIGH

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday became the first Indian President to fly in two different fighter jets, taking a sortie in a Rafale from the Ambala Air Force Station in Haryana. Earlier, she had flown in a Sukhoi-30 MKI in April 2023. Wearing a G-suit and sunglasses, Murmu took off with Group Captain Amit Gehani of the 17 Squadron. The 30-minute flight covered around 200 km, reaching 15,000 feet and a speed of 700 kmph. She described it as an 'unforgettable experience'. ***PHOTO: PTI*** ***>>>More on Page 3***

Modi will even dance for votes: RaGa in Bihar

MUZAFFARPUR/ DARBHANGA, 29 OCT

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday tore into Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claiming he would "do anything for votes even dance on stage."

Addressing rallies in Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga alongside RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, the INDIA bloc's chief ministerial face, Gandhi said, "If you ask him to dance for votes, he will do it. He'll perform Bharat Natyam if it fetches votes."

Gandhi accused BJP of running Nitish Kumar government in Bihar "through remote control". Taking a swipe at Modi's reported plan to take a dip in the Yamuna for Chhath Pooja, he said, "It was shelved when it was exposed that a puddle had been formed with clean, piped water since the river is so dirty." The duo branded Nitish a "mukhauta" (mask) chief minister, alleging that BJP was pulling the strings. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

SIR to begin in Puducherry

PUDUCHERRY, 29 OCT

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Puducherry will begin on 4 November, Chief Electoral Officer P Jawahar announced on Tuesday. The exercise, undertaken after 24 years, aims to ensure accurate and error-free voter lists across all four regions — Puducherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam.

Booth Level Officers will conduct door-to-door verification, distributing pre-filled forms to identify deceased, duplicate or shifted voters, and enrol new eligible ones. The Election Department will also rationalise polling stations by 4 December so that each has no more than 1,200 voters. The draft rolls will be published on 9 December, with claims and objections accepted till 8 January 2026. Final rolls will be released on 7 February. —*PTI*

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PHOTO: PTI

Court rejects jailed Darshan's plea for special amenities

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

A court here on Wednesday rejected a petition filed by actor Darshan Thoogudeepa, currently lodged in prison as an accused in Renukaswamy murder case, seeking additional amenities such as a bed, pillow, bed sheet, and permission to walk within the jail premises. While declining his specific requests, the city court directed prison authorities to provide bedding and clothing once every month. It also allowed officials to decide whether Darshan should be shifted from the quarantine cell to another barrack or to the main cell within the prison. The court has scheduled 31 October to pronounce the charges to be framed against Darshan, actor Pavithra Gowda, and other accused in the Renukaswamy murder case. *—PTI*

RSS march: 4 teachers served showcause notice

BIDAR, 29 OCT

The Karnataka School Education Department has issued notices to four teachers who participated in an RSS route march in Bidar. The Block Education Officer of Aurad in Bidar district served notices on Tuesday. In its notice, the BEO said, "It has been found that you participated in the RSS route march held in Aurad (B) Taluk of Bidar District on 7 October and 13 October. As you are a government employee, you are not permitted to take part in any political or religious activities. By participating in the RSS route march, you have acted in violation of government service rules," the notice said. The BEO asked them to personally appear before it after receiving the notice. It threatened action if they failed to comply. *—PTI*

PM to visit Udupi's Sri Krishna Math on 28 November

UDUPI, 29 OCT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the Sri Krishna Math in Udupi on 28 November, Paryaya Puthige Mutt seer Sugunendra Teertha Swamiji said on Wednesday. The visit, he said, marks a significant occasion that brings national attention to the ancient institution, celebrated for its spiritual and cultural heritage in the State. During his visit, the PM is expected to interact with devotees, participate in religious rituals, and address issues of public interest, the seer said. The Krishna idol at the math was consecrated by the 13th-century philosopher Madhvacharya, founder of the Dvaita (dualism) school of Vedanta, which established Udupi as a global seat of this philosophy. *—PTI*

Farmer threatens suicide after Zameer's leaked call

Shows death note written in blood blaming Housing Minister

KOLAR, 29 OCT

Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed faced an embarrassing moment at a private function in Chikkaballapur on Wednesday. Ramakrishnappa, a farmer, came in front of the dais where Ahmed was and criticised the Minister for taking sides with a trader in neighbouring Telangana.

The farmer alleged that the trader cheated him by not paying for the maize he had bought.

Ramakrishnappa had lodged a complaint with Peresandra police seeking action against the trader, who is allegedly Ahmed's relative.

However, a leaked call purportedly shows Ahmed asking the Peresandra Sub Inspector to reach an amicable settlement between the two parties.

On Wednesday, soon after Ahmed was seated at a function held at Shaadi Mahal in Chikkaballapur, Ramakrishnappa arrived.

He claimed the trader had cheated him of Rs 1.89 crore for the corn. He said the trader was ready to settle the amount after he lodged a police complaint. However, Ahmed's alleged intervention prevented the trader from making the payment.

Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed was confronted by farmer Ramakrishnappa at an event in Chikkaballapur on Wednesday *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Ramakrishna, who had come with his family members, threatened that he would die by suicide along with family members if the amount is not settled by Thursday evening. He also displayed a death note, written in blood, where he had blamed the Minister in the event of him resorting to the extreme step.

Ahmed, however, attempted to downplay the issue, saying that he had asked the police only to settle the case and had not taken sides with the trader. Later, Ramakrishnappa and his family began a dharna in front of the venue.Police then persuaded them to call the protest off. *—Salar News*

THREATENS PROTEST

Metro can move 40X more people than cars: Surya

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya on Wednesday appealed to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to drop the tunnel road project in the City, a day after their meeting failed to achieve any significant breakthrough.

The Bengaluru South MP claimed that for every Rs 1,000 crore spent on the tunnel road, only 1,800 car users could travel per hour, whereas the same investment in Metro Rail would benefit 69,000 passengers per hour. "By building a Metro Rail network, you can transport people 40 times more than those travelling in cars."

Surya warned that his party would challenge the project in court and also take to the streets.

He added that the government should shed the mindset that "only those with cars get married," as Shivakumar had said. "45 lakh people travelling in City buses and 10 lakh people travelling in Metro trains got married." *—PTI*

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya addressing a press conference in the City on Wednesday *PHOTO: X @TEJASVI_SURYA*

ON KARNATAKA RAJYOTSAVA

Despite 'black day' ban, MES to march in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 29 OCT

The Belagavi district administration said the pro-Maharashtrians would not be allowed to observe 1 November— Karnataka Rajyotsava (State formation day) — as a 'Black Day'. However, the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) and the Shiv Sena (UBT) have vowed to proceed with their planned demonstrations, asserting that peaceful dissent is their democratic right.

Maharashtra Ministers Chandrakant Patil and Shambhuraje Desai have been invited to take part in the events. However, their participation is yet to be confirmed.

The MES has been observing 1 November as 'Black Day' every year since the 1956 reorganisation of states, which saw Marathi-speaking regions such as Belagavi, Karwar and Bidar included in Karnataka instead of Maharashtra.

"We have marked this day for decades to express our displeasure over being separated from Maharashtra. It is a tradition of protest we intend to continue," the MES said in a statement.

People purchase State flags ahead of the Karnataka Rajyotsava celebrations, in Bengaluru on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD*

Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan announced that no rallies or public gatherings would be permitted that could disturb Rajyotsava celebrations.

In previous years, MES activists have marched in black attire, displayed black flags, and held meetings at Maratha Mandir in Belagavi South. The organisation plans to follow similar practices this year.

Pro-Kannada outfit Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (KRV) has warned it will oppose any attempt to disrupt the State's celebrations.

Amid the rising tensions, security has been tightened along the Karnataka–Maharashtra border.

Police Commissioner Bhushan Borase said additional forces have been deployed at key entry points.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra continues to press its claim over 846 border villages, including Belagavi, in a case pending before the Supreme Court. *—Salar News*

Show in writing: UTK rejects graft charges

MANGALURU, 29 OCT

Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader on Wednesday rejected the corruption allegations against him as "baseless" and "politically motivated." He asked the BJP leaders to submit their claims in writing.

BJP MP Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri had on Tuesday demanded a judicial probe by a sitting judge into allegations of corruption against Khader over the past 2.5 years and called for bringing the office of the Speaker under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, to ensure transparency.

"I reject (the former speaker's allegations). They are all senior public representatives, whatever doubts they have, they can give me in writing, I will look into it," he said.

"As an MLA I'm working for the development of my constituency, as a Minister in the past -- I have received national awards, and at that time also allegations were there.... It is my duty to improve the system, the legislature, within my limits, and give various benefits to MLAs. I will do it in the future too," he added.

Khader said he would be available at the Vidhana Soudha on Thursday morning, inviting anyone allegations to meet him. Welcoming the demand to bring the Speaker's office under the ambit of the RTI, Khader said, let the BJP leaders approach the Lok Sabha. *—PTI*

DKS will be CM if it is his fate: Brother

BENGALURU/ KOLAR, 29 OCT

Former Congress MP DK Suresh said he desires to see his elder brother Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar become the CM.

However, he refused to comment on Wednesday on speculations about a possible change of Chief Minister and the so-called "November revolution". Suresh asserted that the party's decision would be final.

Asked about his brother's political prospects, he said, "If it is in his fate, it will change. If not, it won't. Why worry about it? I have said that I have a desire to see my brother as CM. If it is in his fate, it will happen."

When asked what efforts were being made toward that goal, he replied, "no efforts." *—PTI.*

Kolar man held for selling leased tractors

KOLAR, 29 OCT

10 tractors and attached trolleys worth over Rs 70 lakh were seized by police after a complaint was lodged at Royalpadu police station in Srinivasapur taluk of Kolar district.

The tractors were seized from Purushottam Reddy resident of Mandikal village in Mulbagal taluk, who was arrested by a team of police headed by Police Sub-Inspector Shivakumar, Gownipalli. According to Shivakumar, the accused approached tractor owners in several villages of Srinivasapur taluk, convincing them to lease their tractors to progressive farmers for a monthly rent of ₹15,000. Between 2021-2023, he managed to persuade around 37 farmers to sign lease agreements. However, after taking possession of the tractors, he allegedly sold them without the owners' consent and went out of contact for nearly two years. Majju, one of the farmer, lodged the complaint. *—Salar News*

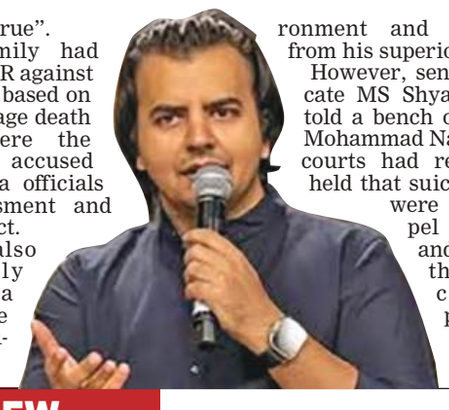
Ola staff's suicide note not true, CEO tells HC

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday directed the Bengaluru Police to continue investigating the alleged suicide of a 38-year-old employee at Ola Electric.

The company's CEP **Bhavish Aggarwal** had approached the court, seeking to quash an FIR lodged against them for abetment to suicide.

Aggarwal told the court that the deceased's suicide note was "not true".



The family had filed an FIR against Aggarwal based on a the 28-page death note where the deceased accused senior Ola officials of harassment and misconduct.

He also reportedly described a hostile work environment and pressure from his superiors.

However, senior advocate MS Shyamsundar told a bench of Justice Mohammad Nawaz that courts had repeatedly held that suicide notes were "not gospel truths" and claimed that the complainant might have influenced its contents.

"I have a strong doubt that it is the brother of the deceased, who is the narrator of this death note," he said,

Shyamsundar also alleged that the complainant's interviews and photos in the media were hurting Ola Electric's share prices. "My shares are dropping because of this." However, the bench comprising of Justice Nawaz said that the probe must go on. *—Agencies*

Swiss companies interested in Quantum City, says Minister

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

Swiss companies and key research institutions in the quantum technology sector have responded positively to partnership opportunities in the proposed Quantum City in Bengaluru, Science and Technology Minister NS Boseraju said on Wednesday.

The State government has allocated 6.17 acres of land at Hesaraghatta in Northwestern City for establishing a "Quantum City" (Q-City), which will have state-of-the-art laboratories, incubation facilities for start-ups and infrastructure for academic-industry collaboration.

At the Swissnex Quantum Summit, his delegation showcased a model of the Quantum City, inviting global investment in the sector. *—Salar News*

4 CORPS TO REVIEW

After Kurnool tragedy, State to audit its buses

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

The four State-run road transport corporations will conduct a safety audit of their buses after the recent bus accident in Kurnool killed 20 people.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy instructed the managing directors of the four corporations to undertake a review of the renewal and maintenance of all buses.

The applies to vehicles operated by the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (KKRTC) and North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC).

In a letter dated 28 October, Reddy described the Kurnool accident as "deeply tragic. In this context, safety systems in all transport corporation buses across the State must be reviewed". Reddy directed officials to maintain strict vigilance to ensure that no easily inflammable or explosive materials are transported along with commercial goods or luggage on buses.

He said all air-conditioned buses must be equipped with hammers to break windows in case of emergencies, and that no person should be allowed to sleep or rest in the luggage compartment area.

Recalling a similar accident near Haveri district during his previous tenure as transport minister, when a private bus caught fire killing several passengers, Reddy said the incident had prompted a State-wide safety drive.

He said the campaign was launched to ensure that around 50,000 vehicles—including transport corporation buses, contract carriage buses, private tourist buses, tempo travellers and school vehicles—were fitted with functional emergency exit doors.

"During that campaign, several deficiencies were identified, and the installation of emergency exits was made mandatory," the letter stated. *—PTI*

2 loot Rs 72L from house in City; held

City Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh looks at phones worth Rs 3 cr seized by the CCB Women Protection Force who arrested 42 robbers, in the City, Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD*

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

Two men have been arrested in connection with a house burglary in Bengaluru, with police recovering gold and silver articles worth about Rs 72 lakh. The investigation began after a resident of Vishwapriya Layout lodged a complaint at the Begur police station, reporting that his house had been broken into while he was away in Udupi between 16 and 18 June.

The burglars had stolen 330 grams of gold ornaments and 1.2 kg of silver articles from a cupboard. Following weeks of CCTV analysis and scrutiny of pawn shop transactions, police detained a suspect near Begur Lake Koli on 6 August.

During questioning, he admitted to the crime and revealed details of his accomplice. The stolen items had been pledged at pawn shops in Kolar Gold Fields (KGF).

Acting on this information, police recovered 614 grams of gold and 470 grams of silver from multiple jewellery shops in KGF and Chintamani between August and October. The second accused was arrested on 14 September. Both confessed to involvement in two more burglaries within Begur limits and several others in Bengaluru Rural district. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Rahul speaks to kin of doc who died by suicide

MUMBAI, 29 OCT

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday spoke to the family of a 28-year-old woman doctor who allegedly died by suicide in Maharashtra's Satara district, assuring them of support and demanding a Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe. In a call lasting seven minutes, the doctor's mother urged Gandhi to ensure justice for the grave injustice done to her daughter. Gandhi promised to press the government to form an SIT. Earlier, he termed the death an 'institutionalised murder' exposing the BJP-led government's inhuman and insensitive nature. The doctor was found hanging in a Satara hotel. Herlast note accused a PSI and a software engineer of rape and harassment. *—PTI*

PM in Gujarat for Sardar Patel's 150 birthday event

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Prime Minister NarendraModi will be on a two-day visit to Gujarat starting Thursday to lead the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of SardarVallabhbhai Patel at Kevadiya. On Thursday evening he will travel to Ekta Nagar, flag off 25 electric buses, inaugurate projects worth over Rs 1,140 crore and lay foundation stones for institutions and tourist amenities aimed at eco-tourism, green mobility, smart infrastructure and tribal development. On 31 October will offer floral tributes at the Statue of Unity, participate in RashtriyaEktaDiwas events and interact with officer trainees of Aarambh 7.0. He will also release a Rs 150 commemorative coin and postal stamp and witness the Ekta Diwas parade.*—PTI*

Defence Minister Singh to visit Kuala Lumpur

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will visit Kuala Lumpur this week to attend the 12th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) on Saturday. The forum, comprising ASEAN nations and eight dialogue partners including India, China and the US, will deliberate on regional security challenges.Singh will address the session on "Reflection on 15 Years of ADMM-Plus and Charting the Way Forward" and share India's views on counter-terrorism and maritime cooperation. He will also join the ASEAN-India Defence Ministers' informal meeting on 31 October and hold bilateral talks with counterparts and Malaysian leaders.India, ASEAN's dialogue partner since 1992, currently co-chairs the ADMM-Plus expert working group on counter-terrorism with Malaysia for 2024–2027.*—PTI*

Dhankhar silent for 100 days since resignation: Cong

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

The Congress on Wednesday questioned former vice president JagdeepDhankhar's "complete silence" since his resignation 100 days ago, saying he has remained 'unseen and unheard.' Party leader Jairam Ramesh said it was 'an unprecedented event' when Dhankhar resigned abruptly on 21 July, citing medical reasons. "That he was forced to do so, even though he sang praises of the PM day in and day out, was obvious," Ramesh posted on X. He said the Opposition, despite frequent clashes with Dhankhar as RajyaSabha Chairman, believes he deserves a farewell like his predecessors. The 74-year-old Dhankhar resigned midterm and was succeeded by CP Radhakrishnan, sworn in as India's 15th vice president.*—PTI*

RJD promises LPG cylinder at Rs 500

Says INDIA will provide accountable govt

PATNA, 29 OCT

RJD leader Tejashwi Prasad Yadav on Friday announced that the Mahagathbandhan would reduce LPG cylinder prices to 500 and raise old-age pensions to Rs 1,500 if voted to power in Bihar. The former deputy chief minister also pledged to provide affordable medicines, employment opportunities and a government "that listens to the people's grievances".

Accusing the BJP-led Centre of shielding corrupt leaders and criminals in the state, Tejashwi asserted that the Opposition alliance would offer "a clean and accountable government". He appealed to voters, particularly from the extremely backward classes, to "give up the illusion that Bihar is run by Nitish Kumar", alleging that the Chief Minister was "a remote-controlled puppet of the BJP".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, addressing the same rally, launched a scathing attack on the Modi government, saying the economy served "five or ten billionaires while the poor suffered".

He said the BJP had "destroyed small and medium industries through demonetisation and a flawed GST", and claimed that "the clothes you wear mostly say 'Made in China'; I want to see the day they say 'Made in Bihar'."

Rahul credited the Congress for pressing the Modi government to agree to a caste census, adding that "two Indias are emerging — one for the rich, another for the rest". He accused the government of allowing monopolies in the telecom sector and distracting the youth with social media "reels" instead of jobs.

Highlighting Bihar's ancient heritage, he invoked Nalanda University as a symbol of the potential of the state.

"I foresee a future when people from America will come to Bihar for higher learning," he said. *—PTI*

'Lalu, Sonia want sons as CM & PM'

NDA will win 2/3rd majority, says BJP

DARBHANGA, 29 OCT

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday attacked the INDIA bloc, alleging that RJD supremo Lalu Prasad wants to make his son Tejashwi the chief minister of Bihar and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi her son Rahul the Prime Minister, while asserting that "both posts were not vacant".

Shah also questioned whether the members of radical outfit Popular Front of India (PFI), who were arrested after the Centre banned the organisation, would remain behind bars if the Congress-RJD combine came to power in Bihar.

Shah termed the Mahagathbandhan as 'thug bandhan', alleging that Lalu Prasad is involved in fodder, bitumen and land-for-jobs scams, while Congress was involved in corruption cases worth Rs 12 lakh crore.

Shah said Rahul Gandhi came to and launched 'save infiltrators yatra', while referring to Voter AdhikarYatra.

Shah said, "The Bihar polls are an election to prevent the return of 'jungle raj' to the state."

Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a gathering ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections in Darbhanga on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

> **Ram temple's construction at Ayodhya removed the blot (kalank) that had mortified India for 500 years. But the RJD's men had committed the sin of stopping the Rath of Lord Ram**
>
> -Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister

The Union home minister said that the NDA government gives free ration to 8.52 crore people of Bihar, constituted Makhana Board, and provides 125 units of free power to domestic consumers. A temple of Goddess Sita is being constructed in Mithila. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said NDA's two-thirds majority in the 243-member Bihar assembly will be a tribute to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on his birthday on 14 November, the day poll results will be announced. *—PTI*

Tie up BJP leaders if they ask for documents: Abhisekh

KOLKATA, 29 OCT

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Wednesday urged people to confront and "tie up" local BJP leaders if they asked for their parents' birth certificates during the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls or for NRC verification.

He said this after visiting the family of Pradeep Kar, who allegedly died by suicide at North 24 Parganas' Panihati over fear of SIR and alleged NRC exercise. MPs ParthaBhowmick and Nirmal Ghosh and youth leader DebrajChakraborty were also present.

Banerjee claimed that the anxiety created by the BJP and the Election Commission had driven the man to take the extreme step.

He accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar of being responsible for the "climate of panic" and demanded criminal action.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has accused the BJP of spreading fear and "weaponising NRC".

The BJP countered that the cause of Kar's death should be determined by investigators. It accused the TMC of exploiting a tragedy for political mileage.

The incident has reignited Bengal's fierce citizenship debate, setting the stage for a high-voltage showdown between the BJP led state government and the BJP-led Centre in the run-up to the next electoral battle.

The TMC claimed that a man in West Bengal's Cooch Behar attempted suicide fearing harassment under SIR. *—PTI*

More polling stations in 12 states, UTs post SIR

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

In a bid to shorten voting queues, the 12 states and union territories that will undergo special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls next week will see more polling stations once the exercise is completed. After SIR process, every polling station in Bihar has a maximum of 1,200 electors against 1,500 earlier. The new polling stations are to be set up in high-rise buildings, colonies with resident welfare associations and slum clusters after consultation with political parties. *—PTI*

Narendra Modi; SanaeTakaich *PHOTO:PTI/WIKICOMMONS*

Modi speaks to Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Prime Minister NarendraModi and Japan's new Prime Minister SanaeTakaichi on Wednesday agreed to work closely to deepen the India–Japan partnership across key strategic areas.

Takaichi, 64, recently made history as Japan's first female prime minister, succeeding Shigeru Ishiba. In his first conversation with her since she assumed office, Modi congratulated her and emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation between the two countries.

"Had a warm conversation with SanaeTakaichi, Prime Minister of Japan. Congratulated her on assuming office and discussed our shared vision for advancing the India–Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership, with focus on economic security, defense cooperation and talent mobility," Modi said in a post on X.

He added that both leaders agreed stronger India–Japan relations are vital for global peace, stability and prosperity.

Modi had met then Prime Minister Ishiba in August. India and Japan signed several landmark agreements, including a framework for defense cooperation and a 10-year roadmap to enhance economic collaboration.

Both nations view their partnership as central to maintaining a free and rules-based Indo-Pacific region. *—PTI*

Kerala to review PM SHRI's implementation

T"PURAM, 29 OCT

Kerala Chief Minister PinarayiVijayan announced on Wednesday that the state government will review the implementation of the Centre's PM SHRI school scheme in light of recent controversies.

A seven-member Cabinet sub-committee, chaired by General Education Minister V Sivankutty, has been formed to examine the matter in detail. The committee includes Ministers K Rajan, P Rajeeve, Roshy Augustine, K Prasad, K Krishnankutty and AK Saseendran.

Vijayan said further action on implementing the scheme will be suspended until the panel submits its report, and the decision will be formally conveyed to the Centre through a letter.

The move follows internal discussions within the CPI(M) and CPI to reach consensus, though the stalemate persists. The CPI's state and national leadership have taken a firm stance against Kerala. *—PTI*

Assam to probe singing of B'desh anthem in Cong meet

HAILAKANDI, 29 OCT

The Assam government has ordered an inquiry after a video surfaced allegedly showing Congress Seva Dal members singing Bangladesh's national anthem during a meeting in Sribhumi district.

Officials said Fishery Minister Krishnendu Paul instructed the district administration to verify the incident and take legal action if necessary.

The event, held at Indira Bhavan, began with two lines of Amar Sonar Bangla written by Rabindranath Tagore, who also penned India's national anthem.

Paul claimed the Congress was displaying "affection for a neighboring country", saying the party was "responsible for creating Pakistan, of which Bangladesh was once a part."

Sribhumi Congress president Tapas Purkayastha said an 85-year-old poet only sang a few lines in honour of Tagore and accused the BJP of politicising culture. State Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi said the BJP was manufacturing controversy. *—PTI*

India, China to maintain peace along LAC

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

India and China held a fresh round of high-level military talks focusing on maintaining peace and security along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh using existing mechanisms.

The Corps Commander-level meeting was held on the Moldo-Chushul border point on the Indian side of the frontier on 25 October.

It was the first such interaction between the two militaries after the Special Representatives' talks in August between National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Security personnel keeping vigil in Ladakh *PHOTO: PTI*

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the two sides shared the view that peace and tranquility has been maintained in the India-China border areas.

In the last few months, India and China have initiated a series of measures to normalise their relations after ending the over four-year military face-off along the LOC in Ladakh following completion of the disengagement process from the last two friction points of Demchok and Depsang.

The two sides are however, yet to de-escalate the situation by pulling back the frontline forces from the border.

Each side currently has around 50,000 to 60,000 troops along the LAC in the eastern Ladakh region.

The military standoff in eastern Ladakh began in May 2020 and a deadly clash at the Galwan Valley in June that year resulted in a severe strain in ties between the two neighbours. *—PTI*

PAK CLAIMED TO CAPTURE PILOT

Prez poses with Rafale's first woman pilot

AMBALA, 29 OCT

President Droupadi Murmu undertook a sortie in a Rafale fighter jet with Squadron leader Shivangi Singh, the country's first woman pilot of the fighter jet from the Air Force Station here on Wednesday, describing it as an "unforgettable experience" that instilled in her a renewed sense of pride in the nation's defence capabilities.

The president posed with Singh, just before she took to the skies.

Singh was claimed to have been captured during 'Operation Sindoor' by a pro-Pakistan social media handle. The Press Information Bureau Fact Check termed this claim as fake.

Air Chief Marshal A P Singh also flew in a separate aircraft from the same air base.

Murmu is the first President of India to have taken a sortie in two fighter aircrafts of the Indian Air Force. In April 2023, she had undertaken a sortie in a Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter aircraft from the Tezpur Air Force Station in Assam.

President Droupadi Murmu poses withn Rafale fighter jet pilot Shivangi Singh at Air Force Station in Ambala on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Before getting on to the Rafale jet, Murmu, donning a G-suit and sporting sunglasses, posed for pictures with the Air Chief Marshal and some other senior IAF officers.

The sortie lasted for 30 minutes, covering about 200 kilometres before returning to the Air Force Station here.

The aircraft was flown by Group Captain Amit Gehani, Commanding Officer of the 17 Squadron.The fighter jet flew at a height of about 15,000 feet above sea level and at a speed of about 700 kilometres per hour.

Upon her arrival at the air base, President Murmu was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour.

She was also briefed on the operational capabilities of Rafale. Manufactured by French aerospace major Dassault Aviation, Rafale fighter aircraft were formally inducted into the Indian Air Force in September 2020.*—PTI*

7 PLANES WERE SHOT DOWN IN INDIA-PAKISTAN WAR: TRUMP

TOKYO, 29 OCT

US President Donald Trump has again claimed he stopped the recent India-Pakistan conflict using trade pressure, saying "seven brand-new, beautiful planes" were shot down before he intervened. Trump said he had called Prime Minister NarendraModi during the May conflict, refusing a trade deal until fighting stopped.

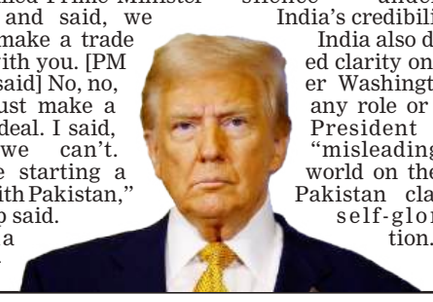
"I called Prime Minister Modi and said, we can't make a trade deal with you. [PM Modi said] No, no, we must make a trade deal. I said, no, we can't. You're starting a war with Pakistan," Trump said.

India maintains the ceasefire followed direct military talks after Operation Sindoor, launched on 7 May in retaliation for the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 civilians.

The Congress sharply criticisedModi's silence on Trump's repeated claims. Jairam Ramesh said Trump had made the claim 56 times globally and accused Modi of "diplomatic weakness."

Congress said Modi's silence "undermines India's credibility."

India also demanded clarity on whether Washington had any role or the US President was "misleading the world on the India-Pakistan clash for self-glorification."



—PTI

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Delhi HC quashes attempt to murder FIR against Kishwar

DELHI, 29 OCT

Delhi High Court has quashed a 17-year-old attempt to murder case against academician Madhu Kishwar, calling it a "maliciously motivated counter blast" to an FIR she had filed for rioting and intimidation. The case stemmed from a 2007 altercation with the Basoya family while Kishwar was photographing alleged unauthorised constructions in Sewa Nagar for her NGO, Manushi. The Basoyas had accused her of instructing her driver to run them over. However, the family was later convicted in Kishwar's FIR for rioting and assault. Justice Amit Mahajan held that the FIR against Madhu Kishwar was an abuse of process, as it arose from the same incident already adjudicated. *—PTI*

Ambulance blocked, driver attacked in Kerala

KOLLAM, 29 OCT

An ambulance carrying a patient was allegedly blocked and attacked by three men at Kottiyam around 8.45pm on Tuesday, police said. The assailants claimed the emergency vehicle had hit their motorbike. Visuals aired on TV showed them breaking the ambulance's side mirror, opening its door to assault the driver, and repeatedly striking the vehicle. The ambulance was allowed to proceed only after locals intervened. Police confirmed the patient was unharmed and safely taken to a private hospital in Kollam. One suspect was traced using the two-wheeler's registration number, but his phone location indicated he was outside the state. The other two remain unidentified. *—PTI*

65-year-old woman raped, killed in Thane

THANE, 29 OCT

A 65-year-old woman was allegedly raped and murdered in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred on Tuesday in Bhiwandi taluka, where the woman's body was found on her farm. Ganeshpuri Police has sent the body for a post-mortem. DSP Rahul Zalte said one suspect has been detained and booked for rape and murder. Officials ruled out theft as a motive since the victim's gold jewellery, estimated at five to six tolas, was found intact. Police said forensic evidence is being collected to ascertain the sequence of events. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Dawood-linked drug gang busted in Goa, 1 held

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has arrested Danish Chikna, alias Danish Merchant, a close aide of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim and the alleged kingpin of a major drug syndicate, from a resort in Goa. Chikna, who had been absconding, was caught along with three others, and 1.341kg of mephedrone was seized from them. NCB officials said 502gm of the drug was earlier seized in Pune, followed by 839 gm recovered from Chikna's Mumbai residence. The accused and his wife, both on the run, were traced after weeks of surveillance and placed under arrest on 25 October. Chikna is a repeat offender with multiple NDPS and criminal cases registered against him in Mumbai and Rajasthan. *—PTI*

Cyclone Montha ravages Andhra, Odisha

Nearly 1.8 lakh people were evacuated from the coasts and housed in 230 relief camps

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Cyclone Montha, which made landfall near Antarvedi village in Andhra Pradesh's Konaseema district shortly after midnight on Tuesday, left a trail of devastation across coastal Andhra and parts of Telangana before weakening into a deep depression.

The storm damaged crops, uprooted trees, disrupted power lines and transport networks, and claimed two lives in Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said.

Naidu conducted an aerial survey of the affected districts, Bapatla, Palnadu, Krishna, Konaseema and Eluru, and reviewed ongoing relief operations.

He said nearly 1.8 lakh people were evacuated and housed in 230 relief camps. The state government announced Rs 3,000 cash relief per family and free essential supplies, including rice, pulses, oil, onions and potatoes, to those in cyclone-hit regions. "Our timely evacuation measures and power shutdowns helped avert a major tragedy," Naidu said, adding that restoration work was under way and only four substations remain non-functional.

Paddy, banana and horticulture crops over 1.5 lakh acres were severely damaged in districts such as Nellore, Prakasam and Bapatla. Agriculture Minister K Atchannaidu said the government will conduct field assessments to estimate crop losses and compensate farmers accordingly. NDRF and SDRF teams have been deployed to clear roads, remove fallen trees and restore connectivity in rural pockets, while medical teams were also dispatched to prevent waterborne diseases.

Neighbouring Telangana witnessed heavy rainfall across Warangal, Mahabubabad, Nalgonda and Hyderabad, prompting Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to issue a red alert and declare holidays for educational institutions in several districts. Reddy also instructed officials to safeguard paddy procurement centres and provide immediate assistance to affected farmers and passengers stranded due to rail disruptions.

According to the IMD, Montha will continue to move north-northwest, bringing rain to Odisha, Jharkhand and WB. While its intensity has weakened, moderate to heavy showers are likely to persist till Friday. *—PTI*

An aerial view of an area affected by Cyclone Montha. (Inset) Andhra CM Chandrababu Naidu inspects the area devastated by the cyclone **PHOTO: PTI**

- The storm damaged crops, uprooted trees, disrupted power lines and transport networks, and claimed two lives in Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said. Naidu conducted an aerial survey of the affected districts, including Bapatla, Krishna and Eluru and reviewed ongoing relief operations.

Delhi: Cloud-seeding test postponed amid dry skies

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

A cloud-seeding trial scheduled for Wednesday here was postponed due to insufficient moisture in the clouds, the Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur (IIT-K) said, noting that the process depends heavily on favourable atmospheric conditions.

Two trials were conducted on Tuesday in collaboration with IIT-K in Burari, north Karol Bagh, Mayur Vihar, and Badli. Though no rainfall occurred in Delhi, light showers were reported in Noida and Greater Noida. IIT-K said that despite moisture levels of only 15 to 20 per cent, the exercise yielded valuable data showing a 6 to 10 per cent drop in PM2.5 and PM10 levels. "Monitoring stations recorded measurable improvement even under limited moisture," it said.

Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa termed the trials "successful" and said nine to ten more will be held to identify the precise moisture threshold for inducing rain. "Once we have concrete data, artificial rain can be deployed in Delhi whenever needed," he told PTI, adding that each trial costs Rs 20–25 lakh. Sirsa also criticised the opposition, saying, "They are jealous of the work being done," and accused the Aam Aadmi Party of being unsuccessful in the previous decade.

The Aam Aadmi Party criticised the exercise as "publicity-driven", arguing that no rainfall occurred and citing past central reports deeming cloud seeding unsuitable for Delhi.

Air purifiers in demand amid pollution surge

Delhi's Air Quality Index stood at 273 on Wednesday morning, improving slightly but still in the "poor" range, according to the Central Pollution Control Board. The persistent pollution has driven a surge in air purifier sales, with brands such as Eureka Forbes and Kent RO reporting 30–40 per cent festive-season growth. Industry reports predict double-digit annual growth for the sector as more families opt for smart purifiers capable of monitoring indoor air quality through mobile apps. *—Agencies*

The aircraft to be used for the first cloud-seeding trial in the national capital takes off from Kanpur **PHOTO: PTI**

Convict in 2012 rape case molests Kolkata woman

KOLKATA, 29 OCT

A woman was allegedly sexually harassed and attacked with glass bottles by a group of men at a nightclub inside Hyatt Regency in Kolkata's Bidhannagar early Sunday, police said.

The incident took place around 4.15am at the Play Boy club, where the woman was with her husband and friends. Police said **Nasir Khan**, convicted in the 2012 Park Street gang rape case, and his nephew Junaid Khan have been charged in connection with the assault. No arrests have been made so far.

In her complaint, the woman alleged the accused picked a fight and tried to touch her inappropriately. "When my brother tried to protect me, they started throwing glass bottles," she said, claiming Junaid later called around 20 men who attacked them and blocked the exits. She added that she was "touched in a very bad way" and attached her medical report and CCTV evidence to the complaint.

A case has been registered under the BNS for assault, confinement and criminal force. *—Agencies*

Drunk driver ordered to distribute 1,000 awareness handbills

PUNE, 29 OCT

A Pune court has directed a 28-year-old man, caught driving under the influence of alcohol, to print and distribute 1,000 handbills warning against drunk driving at city traffic signals.

The Motor Vehicle Court also imposed a Rs 10,000 fine under relevant sections, the Pimpri Chinchwad police said. The man was caught drunk driving on 22 July in the Hinjawadi area. "The court fined him and ordered the awareness drive to educate motorists about the dangers of drunk driving," a police officer said.

Between January and September, Pimpri Chinchwad police acted against 2,984 offenders for similar violations. *—PTI*

FOLLOWED BIN LADEN

Pune techie held over alleged Al-Qaeda links

PUNE, 29 OCT

A software engineer from Pune has been arrested by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) for allegedly maintaining links with the Al-Qaeda terror network.

The accused, identified as Zuber Hungargekar from Solapur, was detained from the Kondhwa area earlier this week under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

According to ATS sources, Hungargekar, who was under surveillance for the past month, had been following speeches of Al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden. The Urdu translation of one such speech was recovered from his possession, along with photos showing him holding an AK-47 rifle and assembling explosives.

Investigators suspect Hungargekar was involved in anti-national activities and may have been planning terror attacks in Maharashtra and other cities. Police are also probing his possible role in radicalising young people.

Hungargekar, described as well-educated and skilled in software testing, previously worked with a private IT firm in Kalyani Nagar. His arrest followed large-scale ATS raids in Kondhwa linked to a terror funding case. *—Agencies*

- ATS said suspect, who was under surveillance for the past month, had been following speeches of Al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden

SC seeks Centre, UT's response on Wangchuk plea

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

The Supreme Court on Wednesday took on record the amended petition filed by climate activist Sonam Wangchuk's wife, Gitanjali J Angmo, challenging his detention under the NSA, and sought the Centre and the Union Territory of Ladakh's response within 10 days.

A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre and Ladakh administration, to file their replies and listed the matter for hearing on 24 November. The court also allowed senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Angmo, to file a rejoinder if required. On 15 October, the top court had deferred the hearing after Angmo sought to amend her plea with additional grounds. An affidavit by the Jodhpur jail authorities confirmed that Wangchuk's brother and lawyer had met him. *— PTI*

INDIA UN ROW

India slams UN's 'biased' report on Myanmar refugees

UNITED NATIONS/NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

India has strongly condemned what it described as a "blinkered analysis" made against it in a UN report on Myanmar's human rights situation, and asserted the claim that the Pahalgam terrorist attack impacted displaced persons from Myanmar as having "absolutely no factual bearing".

India also reiterated its call for an immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, underlining that sustainable peace can only be secured through inclusive political dialogue and early restoration of democratic processes through credible and participatory elections.

Delivering India's statement during the Interactive Dialogue on the human rights situation in Myanmar at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, Lok Sabha MP Dilip Saikia expressed serious objection to the "baseless and biased" observations made by the UN Special Rapporteur against India in its report on Myanmar's human rights situation.

"I express serious objections to the baseless and biased observation in the report regarding my country," he said.

Saikia strongly denounced the "biased approach" adopted by the Special Rapporteur (SR) concerning the civilian victims of the April 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, which he said was viewed through a "communal lens". He asserted that the claim linking the April 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam with displaced persons from Myanmar has absolutely "no factual bearing".

"My country rejects such prejudice and blinkered analysis by the Special Rapporteur," Saikia said.

In his recent report on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Special Rapporteur Thomas H Andrews has said, "Following the April 2025 terrorist attack on Hindu tourists in Jammu and Kashmir, refugees from Myanmar have been under pressure in India even though no individuals from Myanmar were involved in the attack." *—PTI*

- India also reiterated its call for an immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, underlining that sustainable peace can only be secured through inclusive political dialogue and early restoration of democratic processes.

FOR TOUCHING BIG B'S FEET

Pro-Khalistan group vows to 'shut down' Diljit's concert in Aus

Singer Diljit Dosanjh touches feet of Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Pro-Khalistan outfit Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) has vowed to shut down Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh's concert in Australia on 1 November, the day Akal Takht Sahib observes Sikh Genocide Remembrance Day.

The United States-based group's protest follows Dosanjh's gesture of touching actor Amitabh Bachchan's feet at a recent event.

SFJ's counsel Gurpatwant Singh Pannun accused him of "insulting victims, widows and orphans" of the 1984 Sikh Genocide by honouring Bachchan, whom the group blames for allegedly inciting mobs with the slogan "Khoon Ka Badla Khoon" (Blood for Blood).

Calling the show a "mockery of remembrance", SFJ urged global Sikh organisations to boycott it. The group further announced a "Panthic Shutdown Rally" outside the venue.

The group has also written to Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj, seeking Dosanjh's summons for explanation.

"Remembrance is not for sale, and genocide cannot be normalised for applause," SFJ said, accusing singer Diljit Dosanjh of commercialising a month of mourning.

The singer, currently on a global tour, has not commented on the matter. *—Agencies*

Plane crash was devastating; doing best for affected: AI CEO

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Air India CEO **Campbell Wilson** on Wednesday described the June plane crash that killed 260 people as 'absolutely devastating' for the families, staff, and all those involved.

Speaking at the Aviation India and South Asia 2025 conference in New Delhi, his first public appearance in India since the tragedy, Wilson said the airline has been doing 'absolutely everything' to support the victims' families, first responders and others affected to ease their journey forward.

The AI Boeing 787-8 aircraft, operating flight AI171 from Ahmedabad to London Gatwick, crashed shortly after take-off on 12 June, killing 241 passengers and 19 crew members.

Wilson said the interim investigation found no issues with the aircraft, its engines or Air India's operations. "We await the final report, and if there's anything to learn from it, we will," he stated. He added that any incident in aviation is a reason for introspection and continuous improvement.

The Tata Group-owned airline has completed interim compensation payments and is finalising the final compensation for those affected. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau's preliminary report indicated that the fuel supply to both engines was cut off within one second, causing confusion before the crash. *— PTI*

PROTEST AGAINST TRUMP

Protesters tear a banner with a face of US President Donald Trump during a protest rally in Gyeongju, South Korea, on Wednesday. The protest was against Trump's high tariffs and pressure on South Korea to increase defence spending. Trump has arrived in the country to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, which will start from 31 October to 1 November, 2025
PHOTO: PTI

Bihar rues lack of education, jobs, but fears talking 'politics

Around 32% of candidates in the fray in the first phase of the Bihar polls have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits, while 27% declared serious criminal cases
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

On the dusty city square in Bihar's Mokama, one of the most keenly watched seats where the fight is being seen as that between two 'Bahubali' politicians with criminal records, fear is palpable.

In the fray here is Anant Singh, a local strongman who is the candidate from the ruling JD(U), pitted against Veena Devi, RJD candidate and wife of another 'bahubali,' Surajbhan Singh, who has been debarred from fighting elections.

Locals are not keen on talking about their inclinations or the political scenario.

At a shop that sells agricultural supplies, two men sitting on the counter refuse to talk about the elections.

"All kinds of people come to our shop; what if we say something that does not go down well with someone? We would be in trouble," said the man, who did not want to be named.

Asked about the general situation, expectations of people and issues faced by the locals, his companion rues that nothing has changed over the years; however, as he tries to list out issues, he is immediately stopped from speaking more.

"We don't want to talk about any party," he said.

A few hundred metres away, at the Jay Prakash Chowk, commonly called Prakash Chowk, the narrow two-lane road is choked with traffic, with battery rickshaws, which have fast grown to replace cycle-rickshaws. Even ambulances stuck on the congested road have no other option but to wait.

Sitting at a sweet shop, Anand (name changed), a 22-year-old graduate preparing for competitive exams, does not want to talk about politics.

"I have no idea about politics," he said.

Asked about the state of education in Mokama, Anand said, "It's pathetic."

"Classes are not held regularly, teachers are absent most of the time... But we have no other option".

Their income from the shop is barely enough to make ends meet, and going out of Mokama for education is out of the question.

When asked about his expectations from the upcoming Bihar Assembly polls, he, though refusing to comment on either of the candidates, said, "everyone wants change, better facilities, especially education, healthcare and employment".

Nearby, sitting at a pan shop, Munna Kumar said Anant Singh is popular with people and also helps locals with their work. A customer at the shop praises him. "Ek number admi hai (He is a good person)," said the man who identified himself as Prakash Kumar.

He comes from an agricultural family. The area has fertile agricultural land with pulses as the main crop, but a huge area remains inundated under water every year, known locally as 'tal'.

An industrial city once, the now shut units here include a manufacturing unit of Bharat Wagon and Engineering Company Limited (BWEL), a factory of shoe manufacturer Bata and a unit of United Spirits, which was established by Vijay Mallya's father, Vittal Mallya.

Locals are, however, guarded in expressing their opinion, even as they rue the lack of basics, such as education and healthcare.

At a local grocery store, owner Amar Nath said unemployment is the biggest issue.

He said Mokama is peaceful, criminals have been controlled, and incidents of extortion, etc., are not happening anymore. He, however, said that the opening of big malls around has affected their business. "Unemployment is very high. People do jobs that pay Rs. 10,000-15,000, but they feel at least they can live in peace," he said.

A local, who works outside Bihar in a PSU, and did not want to be named, said people have little option because political parties back the 'bahubalis'.

Karim, a cycle rickshaw puller, complains that there are still people who do not pay him after riding on his rickshaw.

Around 32 per cent of candidates in the fray in the first phase of the Bihar polls have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits, while 27 per cent have declared serious criminal cases against themselves.

At least 33 candidates in the first phase have cases related to murder.

Surajbhan Singh, who has served as the MLA from Mokama in past, and also as a Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) MP, was debarred from contesting elections after conviction in a murder case.

His wife, Veena Devi, who is fighting on an RJD ticket in this assembly poll, has served as an MP from Munger as an LJP leader.

In the 2020 Bihar Assembly election, Anant Singh won the seat as an RJD candidate but was later disqualified after his conviction under the Arms Act in 2022. His wife, Neelam Devi, won the bypoll and subsequently shifted her loyalty to JD(U).

Anant Singh is now contesting from JD(U) in Mokama this time. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Middle-East women scribes drive crucial change

These are few of the Middle East reporters. Anti-clockwise from top left: Katia Tome; Christiane Baissary; Najlaa Aboumerhi; Diyala Khalili; Ranya Dridi
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Last month marked the third anniversary of the Women, Life, Freedom movement in Iran, an uprising that has been described as the country's most significant movement since the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

Though authoritarian powers and patriarchal systems continue to oppress, women journalists in the Middle East have combined reporting and activism.

Many of these professionals operate under regimes that criminalise dissent. For them, reporting isn't just a profession, it merges with acts of resistance.

Across the region, journalists like Egypt's **Lina Attalah**, who continues to publish investigative reports despite state repression, and Yemen's Afrah Nasser, whose exile hasn't silenced her voice, act as catalysts for change, using their platforms to amplify marginalised voices, challenge oppressive systems and mobilize communities in liberation-focused movements.

Through the years, their work has gone far beyond reporting news and has become a vital force for truth, justice and social transformation in the region.

TELLING THE TRUTH UNDER THREAT

Ever since social media and blogs became widely accessible, women journalists have stood at the forefront, playing a crucial role in raising awareness of inequality, often in competition with predominantly male-dominated mainstream news outlets that are heavily censored or operate under tight government influence.

My Stealthy Freedom (MSF), for example, one of the most prominent social movements in Iran, was launched in 2014 by exiled Iranian journalist Masih Alinejad.

What started as a Facebook page supporting Iranian women's autonomy in making personal choices about their dress quickly gained more than one million followers.

In May 2017, MSF launched the #WhiteWednesdays campaign, encouraging participants to wear white headscarves or other symbols on Wednesdays as a visible form of protest against the mandatory hijab law. The campaign later expanded through tactical hashtags like#MarchingWithoutHijab and #OurCameraIs OurWeapon.

In Lebanon, independent journalist Luna Safwan, who covers corruption, gender-based violence and protest movements, has experienced co-ordinated online harassment for her critical reporting on Hezbollah and gender inequality.

Lina Attalah, editor-in-chief of Mada Masr, one of the few remaining independent media outlets in Egypt, has been detained several times for publishing investigative reports on government corruption and women's rights.

Award-winning Yemeni journalist and blogger Afrah Nasser was forced to flee into exile after documenting human rights violations and gender-based violence during Yemen's civil war. As a researcher with Human Rights Watch, she continues to advocate for accountability, freedom of expression and justice for victims of war crimes in Yemen.

Yara Bader, a Syrian Journalist and human rights advocate who leads the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, has exposed state-led detentions, torture and media suppression.

Despite facing arrest and exile, she continues to advocate for press freedom and the protection of detained journalists in Syria.

In Tunisia, Lina Ben Mhenni — a blogger, digital activist and journalist — used her blog, A Tunisian Girl, during the Arab Spring to report on rural and under-covered regions. She documented police brutality and government repression and helped expose injustices to both the Tunisian public and the international community. She later became an advocate for human rights and freedom of expression in Tunisia.

Al Jazeera Palestinian journalist Bisan Owda has used her Instagram account to issue calls for global solidarity since 2023. The reporting of Owda and others from Gaza, like Hind Khoudary and Youmna ElSayed, have led to worldwide demonstrations, including a global strike on university campuses in 2024 and, more recently, the global strike in August 2025.

Middle Eastern women journalists like these have been crucial in documenting on-the-ground realities and mobilizing resistance against colonial, authoritarian and patriarchal violence.

RECLAIM NARRATIVE DIGITALLY

The truth is that Middle Eastern women journalists have been actively reporting in places like Palestine and covering other conflict zones, often under dangerous conditions, for a long time.

And although Middle Eastern women journalists face a dual struggle — against patriarchal state structures and lingering colonial forces — they persist, fighting for a more equitable world and to mobilize others toward that goal.

In today's world, where human rights seem increasingly fragile, Middle Eastern women journalists demonstrate determination and resilience. They advocate for human rights and fight against gender-based violence while shaping narratives and striving for social transformation within their geopolitical contexts and beyond. *—PTI*

Climate change claims millions of lives annually: Lancet-WHO report

The World Health Organization (WHO) and The Lancet have sounded a stark warning that continued inaction on climate change is claiming millions of lives each year and threatening global health, economies, and livelihoods.

In a joint statement issued on Wednesday, the organisations called for urgent recognition of health as the most powerful driver of climate action.

The warning comes with the release of the 2025 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, produced in collaboration with WHO. The report found that 12 of 20 key indicators tracking health threats have reached record levels, highlighting how overreliance on fossil fuels and failure to adapt to a warming planet are taking a devastating toll on human health.

"The climate crisis is a health crisis. Every fraction of a degree of warming costs lives and livelihoods," said Dr Jeremy Farrar, Assistant Director-General for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Care at WHO. "Climate inaction is killing people now in all countries. However, climate action is also the greatest health opportunity of our time. Cleaner air, healthier diets, and resilient health systems can save millions of lives now and protect current and future generations," he added.

The report revealed that heat-related mortality has increased by 23 per cent since the 1990s, with an estimated 546,000 deaths per year. In 2024 alone, the average person was exposed to 16 days of dangerous heat that would not have occurred without climate change. Extreme weather events like droughts and heatwaves contributed to food insecurity for an additional 124 million people in 2023.

The economic cost has also been staggering. Heat exposure led to the loss of 640 billion potential labour hours in 2024, equivalent to USD 1.09 trillion in productivity losses. The financial cost of heat-related deaths among older adults reached USD 261 billion.

The report also criticised governments for continuing to pour vast sums into fossil fuel subsidies, which totalled USD 956 billion in 2023--over three times the amount pledged to support climate-vulnerable countries. Fifteen nations reportedly spent more on fossil fuel subsidies than on their national health budgets.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Despite the bleak outlook, the report highlighted the positive health benefits of decisive climate action. Between 2010 and 2022, reductions in coal-based air pollution prevented an estimated 160,000 premature deaths annually. Renewable energy generation reached 12 per cent of global electricity in 2024, creating around 16 million jobs worldwide.

Dr Marina Romanello, Executive Director of the Lancet Countdown at University College London, emphasised that the tools to prevent further catastrophe already exist. The report also praised cities, communities, and the health sector for leading the charge despite slowing national commitments. Nearly all reporting cities — 834 out of 858 — have completed or plan to complete climate risk assessments. The health sector itself has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 16 per cent globally between 2021 & 2022 while maintaining care quality.

According to WHO, 58 per cent of its Member States have now completed health vulnerability and adaptation assessments, while 60 per cent have finalised national health adaptation plans.

As the world prepares for COP30 in Belem, Brazil, the report calls for placing health at the centre of global climate action. WHO announced that it will release a COP30 Special Report on Climate Change and Health, outlining the policies and investments needed to safeguard health and equity as part of the forthcoming Belem Action Plan.

Now in its ninth year, the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change is a collaboration between WHO, University College London, and 71 academic and UN institutions, with core support from Wellcome. It remains the most comprehensive annual assessment of the health impacts of climate change and the benefits of urgent, coordinated climate action. *—ANI*

UK man booked for raping woman of Indian-origin

LONDON, 29 OCT

A man arrested on suspicion of the racially aggravated sexual assault of an Indian-origin woman in Walsall has been charged with rape and appeared before Birmingham Magistrates Court on Wednesday. The West Midlands Police said John Ashby, "who is a white British man aged 32 from Stockland Green", was charged on Tuesday evening. The rape charge comes after a woman in her 20s, a Sikh student, was attacked in the Park Hall area of Walsall on Saturday night. "He was also charged with sexual assault, strangulation, racially aggravated actual bodily harm and robbery," police said. Detective Superintendent Ronan Tyrer said the woman "is continuing to be supported by our specially-trained officers".*—PTI*

Netherlands votes in polls as Wilders eyes 2nd win

THE HAGUE, 29 OCT

Dutch voters are going to the polls Wednesday in a knife-edge general election after a campaign that focused on migration, a housing crisis and whether parties will work with anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders if his Party for Freedom repeats its stunning victory from two years ago. The vote comes against a backdrop of deep polarisation and violence at an anti-immigration rally in The Hague and at protests against new asylum-seeker centres. Wilders' party, which wants a total halt to asylum-seekers entering the Netherlands, may win the largest number of seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives. Mainstream parties have ruled out forming a coalition with Wilders.*—PTI*

Tanzania votes as ruling party seeks another term

NAIROBI, 29 OCT

Polling stations across Tanzania opened Wednesday for an election marked by concerns from human rights organizations and the detention of opposition members. President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party is seeking a second term. Preliminary results are expected within 24 hours, but the electoral commission has up to seven days to announce the final outcome. The leader of the main opposition CHADEMA party, Tundu Lissu, is in prison, facing treason charges after calling for electoral reforms, while the second largest opposition party's candidate was barred from running. Amnesty International said it had verified cases of enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and extra-judicial killings ahead of the polls. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

At 70, 'Frasier' actor Grammer welcomes 8th child

LOS ANGELES, 29 OCT

Veteran actor Kelsey Grammer, best known for his role in popular series 'Frasier' and several 'X-Men' films, has become a father again at the age of 70. Grammer announced this on "Pod Meets World" podcast, revealing that he and his wife, Kayte Walsh, recently welcomed a baby boy named Christopher. "We just had our fourth one, it just became eight kids.....?" Grammer said. Christopher is the couple's fourth child together. Grammer also has four older children from previous relationships, including two with ex-wife Camille. The actor discussed his book, 'Karen: A Brother Remembers' in the poscase. Grammer's next movie is 'Avengers: Doomsday', in which he will play Hank McCoy aka Beast. *—PTI*

Israel kills 104 in Gaza, says ceasefire is back

Trump backs Netanyahu, says Hamas is misbehaving

DEIR AL-BALAH, 29 OCT

Israel's military said on Wednesday the ceasefire was back in Gaza after it carried out heavy airstrikes across the Palestinian territory that killed at least 104 people, including 46 children, according to local hospitals.

The strikes — the deadliest since the ceasefire was enacted on 10 October— marked the most serious challenge to the tenuous truce to date.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas of Hamas of violating the ceasefire and said he had ordered the military to conduct "powerful strikes" over Gaza. The order came after an Israeli official said its forces were fired upon in southern Gaza.

Israel also accused Hamas of handing over body parts on Monday that Israel said were the partial remains of a hostage whose body was recovered two-years ago.

Hamas said in response that it would delay handing over the body of another hostage.

An Israeli army flare drifts over an area in the northern Gaza Strip; Mourners during the funeral of their relatives killed in an Israeli arm strike at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

US President Donald Trump, currently on a trip to Asia, defended the strikes, saying Israel was justified in carrying them out.

Trump said that Israel "should hit back" when its troops come under attack. However, he showed confidence the ceasefire would withstand. "Hamas is a very small part of the overall Middle East peace. And they have to behave," he said. He reiterated that they will be "terminated" if they don't behave.

Displaced Palestinians at a camp near a strike site found the body of a small child and wrapped it in a blanket.

"What kind of a ceasefire is this?" Amna Qrinawi, a survivor, asked. *—PTI*

India made sure Afghan peace talks failed: Pak

ISLAMABAD, 29 OCT

"As far as the narrative of 'graveyard of empires', Pakistan certainly doesn't claim to be an empire, but Afghanistan is definitely a graveyard, surely for its own people. Never a graveyard of empires but certainly a playground of empires you have been throughout history. (Afghanistan is known as 'the graveyard of empires' because foreign powers have failed to achieve great success there)

Khawaja Asif,
Pakistan Defence Minister

Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban threatened each other after the four-day peace talks failed in Istanbul. Islamabad accused Kabul of backtracking on its commitments, claiming yet again that it was New Delhi's puppet.

The four-day talks began on Saturday and were facilitated by Turkey, after deadly clashes along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border killed dozens.

The clashes broke out after Pakistan launched cross-border strikes, blaming Afghanistan of harbouring Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which it has killed several people in terrorist strikes.

Pakistan's Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar, said the peace talks ended without a "workable" solution because the Taliban delegation was unwilling to take concrete measures to curb cross-border terrorism.

The Taliban, meanwhile, reportedly threatened to strike Islamabad.

Reacting to the Taliban, Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif threatened to "obliterate" the Taliban.

"Let me assure them that Pakistan does not require to employ even a fraction of its full arsenal to completely obliterate the Taliban regime and push them back to the caves for hiding," he said on X, slamming the Taliban's "venomous" statements.

Asif had told Pakistani media earlier that an agreement was about to be reached with Afghanistan, but Afghan negotiators backpedalled due to intervention from Kabul during the negotiations.

"If Afghanistan even looks at Islamabad, we will gouge their eyes out," he had said.

"The people in Kabul pulling the strings and staging the puppet show are being controlled by Delhi," he said, according to Dawn.

"Whenever we got close to an agreement when negotiators reported to Kabul, there was intervention, and the agreement was withdrawn," he said. *—Agencies*

Hurricane Melissa kills 25 in Haiti, ruins Cuba

SANTIAGO DE CUBA, 29 OCT

Flooding from Hurricane Melissa killed 25 people in Haiti while the storm still churned across Cuba on Wednesday after leaving Jamaica with widespread damage and power outages, officials say.

Jean Bertrand Subrème, mayor of Petit-Goâve, said that 25 people died after La Digue river burst its banks

and flooded homes. Dozens of homes collapsed and people were still trapped under rubble on Wednesday morning.

Parts of Granma province, especially the municipal capital, Jiguaní, were underwater. More than 40cm of rain was reported in Jiguaní's settlement of Charco Redondo.

Officials reported collapsed houses, blocked mountain roads and roofs blown off. Authorities said about 735,000 people remained in shelters in eastern Cuba. Melissa had top sustained winds of 155kmph, a Category 2 storm.

Melissa was forecast to continue weakening as it crossed Cuba but remain strong as it moves across the southeastern or central Bahamas. It was expected to make its way late Thursday near or to the west of Bermuda. Haiti and the Turks and Caicos also braced for its effects.

At least one more death was reported in Jamaica, where Melissa roared ashore Tuesday with top sustained winds of 295kmph, one of the strongest Atlantic hurricanes on record. *—PTI*

The ceasefire announcement comes as parties begin campaigning for an election critics and opposition term a sham **PHOTO: UN**

Myanmar rebels sign ceasefire with military

BANGKOK, 29 OCT

A major ethnic rebel group in Myanmar announced it signed a cease-fire with the military on Wednesday, following China-mediated talks.

The ceasefire with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) marks a significant victory for Myanmar's military government, which has regained territories ahead of elections scheduled to start 28 December. Critics see the polls, which exclude the main Opposition parties, as an attempt to legitimise and maintain the military's rule.

The ceasefire was signed during talks mediated by China on Monday and Tuesday in Kunming, about 400km from the border with Myanmar, the TNLA said in a statement.

Beijing has major geopolitical and economic interests in Myanmar. China is the most important foreign ally of Myanmar's military, which took power after ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

The announcement came after the rebels gave up control of Nawnghkio, Kyaukme and Hsipaw, three strategic towns on a major highway linking central Myanmar to China, back to the army in a fierce military offensive.

The rebels said they would withdraw troops from Mogok, the ruby-mining centre in the upper Mandalay region and the neighbouring town of Momeik in northern part of Shan state, though no timeline was provided. In return, the military agreed to stop its ground offensives and airstrikes on the group's remaining territories.

The TNLA is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, which also includes the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Arakan Army. *—PTI*

Trump makes trade deal with S Korea

GYEONGJU, 29 OCT

US President Donald Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung finalised details of their trade deal on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit on Wednesday in Gyeongju.

South Korea's presidential aide, Kim Yong-beom, said the two sides will reduce reciprocal tariffs from 25 per cent to 15 per cent, as was agreed earlier this year.

South Korea will also invest $350bn in the US, including $200bn in cash investment and $150bn in shipbuilding, Kim said.

Trump, who is in South Korea on the last stop of his Asia trip is set to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the APEC on Thursday, in a meeting that will have ramifications on the global economy.

"We made our deal, pretty much finalised it," Trump said at a dinner with Lee and other regional leaders.

Lee had dialled up the flattery, something that has noticeably been working on Trump.

President Donald Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, who gifted the American a gold crown in South Korea, Wednesday, **PHOTO: PTI**

There was a special lunch menu featuring US-raised beef and a gold-adorned brownie. A band played Trump's campaign anthem of 'Y.M.C.A.' when he landed and stepped off his Air Force One.

Lee told him that "you are indeed making America great again."

Both countries have historically been key allies - but tensions spiked after hundreds of South Koreans were detained in an immigration raid in the US last month. *—PTI*

US SENATE REJECTS TRUMP'S 50% TARIFFS ON BRAZIL

WASHINGTON, 29 OCT

The US Senate has voted 52 to 48 to block US President Donald Trump's 50 per cent tariff imposition on Brazilian goods, rejecting the national emergency declaration he used to impose the measure in July.

The voting on Tuesday saw five Republican Senators—Thom Tillis from North Carolina, Susan Collins from Maine, Lisa Murkowski from Alaska, Mitch McConnell from Kentucky, and Rand Paul from Kentucky—joining Democrats.

The vote, which comes as part of a series of three expected resolutions targeting Trump's tariffs on Brazil, Canada, and other countries, highlights rising concerns in Congress over the economic impact of the President's trade policies.

In July, Trump announced the tariff on Brazilian exports, over what he described as a witch hunt against former president Jair Bolsonaro. The Trump ally was being tried for attempting to overturn Brazil's 2022 election. *—ANI*

N Korea tests missiles as Don visits South

North Korea said Wednesday its recent test-firings of sea-to-surface cruise missiles were successful, in another display of its growing military capabilities as Trump visits South Korea. North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said the missiles fired Tuesday flew for more than two hours before accurately striking targets in its western waters.

VP: Soldiers will be paid amid shutdown

Vice President JD Vance said US military members will be paid at the end of the week, though he didn't specify how the Trump administration will reconfigure funding as the second-longest shutdown drags on. Millions of Americans this week face the prospect of losing food assistance with funding cuts, while federal workers miss their first full paycheck.

BLOODBATH IN BRAZIL

Massive police raid on Rio gang kills 64

RIO DE JANEIRO, 29 OCT

At least 64 people died in Rio de Janeiro as police carried out a massive raid against organised crime, officials said.

Four of the deceased were police officers.

Rio de Janeiro State Governor Cláudio Castro told reporters at a press conference that police confiscated a "large quantity of drugs" in the raid, according to Reuters. Authorities said the raid aimed to curb the territorial expansion of the criminal group Comando Vermelho (Red Command).

According to Rio's state government, the operation had been planned for over a year and involved more than 2,500 military and civilian police personnel.

Residents look at the bodies of people killed during a police raid targeting the Comando Vermelho gang in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil **PHOTO: PTI**

Calling it the biggest such raid in history, authorities said it included officers in helicopters and armoured vehicles and targeted the notorious Red Command in the sprawling low-income favelas of Complexo de Alemao and Penha.

The forces entered several neighbourhoods controlled by the gang in what officials described as one of the biggest anti-crime drives in recent years.

At least 81 people were arrested, and security officials said the number of casualties could rise as the operation continues. Authorities also reported the seizure of at least 42 rifles during the crackdown, CNN reported. The government said gang members allegedly used drones to target police in retaliation.

Comando Vermelho, founded during Brazil's military dictatorship in the 1970s, is the country's oldest and most influential criminal organisation. Originally formed as a Leftist prisoners' group, it has since evolved into a transnational syndicate involved in drug trafficking and extortion. *—Agencies*

Sudan army says RSF killed 2,000 after seizing key city

CAIRO, 29 OCT

An unverified video shows destruction in el-Fasher, Sudan **PHOTO: FB**

Reports suggest that the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has been carrying on a wave of ethnically motivated mass killings and other atrocities after seizing Sudan's el-Fasher.

In a statement, the Joint Forces – who are allied with Sudan's army – accused the RSF of having executed more than 2,000 unarmed civilians in recent days.

Unverified footage from local activists have shown the RSF of shooting a group of unarmed civilians sitting on the ground at point-blank range.

Different footage purportedly showed dozens of people lying dead on the ground alongside burnt-out vehicles.

The head of the UN health agency said that more than 460 people were reportedly killed in Saudi Maternity Hospital in el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur.

The RSF seized the city after more than 500 days of siege.

Meanwhile, Arab nations including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and Jordan condemned the RSF. However, there was no statement by the UAE, which the UN has accused of supporting the RSF.

—Salar News with Agencies

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Gold rebounds by Rs 2,600 to Rs 1,24,400/10g

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Gold prices on Wednesday rebounded by Rs 2,600 to Rs 1,24,400 per 10g in the national capital, snapping a two-session losing streak, amid a fresh wave of safe-haven buying ahead of the policy outcome by the US Federal Reserve. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 2,600 to Rs 1,23,800 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of Rs 1,21,200 per 10g, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 1,21,800 per 10g on Tuesday. Silver also witnessed a sharp rebound as prices surged by Rs 6,700 to Rs 1,51,700 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). Spot gold climbed by USD 77.26, or 1.95 per cent, to USD 4,029.53 per ounce, ending a three-day losing streak. *—PTI*

Rupee rises by 8P, closes at 88.21 against USD

MUMBAI, 29 OCT

The rupee appreciated eight paise to close at 88.21 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, on strong domestic markets and optimism over the trade deal between India and the US. Forex traders said upbeat market sentiment, driven by trade deal optimism and easing crude oil prices, enthused investor sentiment, even as importer demand for dollars capped sharp gains. Moreover, investors remain cautious ahead of the US FOMC meeting decision. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 88.21, and later traded in a range of 88.15 to 88.35 during the day. The local unit finally settled at 88.21 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a gain of 8 paise from its previous close. *—PTI*

India's copper demand up by 9.3%: Report

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

India's copper demand grew by 9.3 per cent to 1,878 kilo tonnes (KT) in FY25 due to robust economic progress and increasing adoption of the metal across critical sectors, a report released on Wednesday said. The International Copper Association India (ICA India) released its copper demand report for FY2025. The country's copper demand was 1,718KT in FY24. India's continued emphasis on large-scale infrastructure projects, building construction, clean energy transition and emerging technologies has accelerated demand for key industrial materials, with copper emerging as a critical enabler across these sectors, it said. *—PTI*

L&T profit rises by 16% to Rs 3,926 cr in Q2

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Infrastructure major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Wednesday reported a 15.6 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 3,926.09 crore for the September quarter on the back of higher revenues. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 3,395.29 crore in the year-ago period, L&T said in a regulatory filing. The consolidated revenue from operations in the July-September period rose 10 per cent to Rs 67,983.53 crore, over Rs 61,554.58 crore in FY25, the filing said. The company said it has secured orders worth Rs 2,10,237 crore, registering a year-on-year growth of 39 per cent for the half-year ended 30 September, 2025. International orders at Rs 1,24,236 crore during the half-year constituted 59 per cent of the total orders. *—PTI*

SBI MF invests ₹100 cr in Lenskart in pre-IPO round

Neha Bansal transferred 24.87 lakh equity shares to SBI AIF

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

SBI Mutual Fund has invested Rs 100 crore in eyewear retailer Lenskart Solutions in a pre-IPO (initial public offering) funding round.

As part of the transaction, Neha Bansal, one of the promoters, transferred 24.87 lakh equity shares at Rs 402 apiece to SBI Optimal Equity Fund (AIF) and SBI Emergent Fund AIF, Lenskart said in a public announcement on Wednesday.

After the transaction, Bansal's stake in the eyewear firm would come down to 7.46 per cent from 7.61 per cent earlier.

Last week, Radhakishan Damani, founder of Avenue Supermarts (DMart), invested around Rs 90 crore in Lenskart through a pre-IPO transaction. Damani picked up shares from Nehal Bansal, the sister of founder and CEO Peyush Bansal.

The share sale does not form part of the IPO's Offer-for-Sale.

The latest investment comes ahead of Lenskart's Rs 7,278 crore initial share-sale, which is scheduled to open for public subscription on 31 October.

The company has fixed a price band of Rs 382 to Rs 402 per share for its IPO, giving it a valuation of over Rs 69,700 crore at the upper end.

Lenskart's maiden public offering comprises a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 2,150 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 12.75 crore equity shares by promoters and investors.

Lenskart proposes to utilise the proceeds from the IPO for various strategic initiatives, including capital expenditure for setting up new company-operated, company-owned (CoCo) stores in India; payments related to lease, rent, and license agreements for these CoCo stores; investments in technology and cloud infrastructure; brand marketing and business promotion to enhance brand awareness; potential unidentified inorganic acquisitions; and general corporate purposes.

- Last week, Radhakishan Damani, founder of DMart, invested around Rs 90 crore in Lenskart through a pre-IPO transaction. Damani picked up shares from Nehal Bansal, the sister of founder and CEO Peyush Bansal.

The company, one of India's largest omni-channel eyewear retailers, offers a wide range of affordable and fashionable prescription eyeglasses, sunglasses, and contact lenses through its online platform and extensive retail network.

Lenskart will make its debut on the stock exchanges on 10 November. *—PTI*

2,482 STOCKS ADVANCE

Markets rally on US Fed rate cut hopes

MUMBAI, 29 OCT

PHOTO: PTI

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty settled in the positive territory on Wednesday, tracking a rally in global peers, amid hopes of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve and fresh foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 368.97 points or 0.44 per cent to settle at 84,997.13. During the day, it jumped 477.67 points or 0.56 per cent to 85,105.83.

A total of 2,482 stocks advanced, while 1,668 declined and 175 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 117.70 points or 0.45 per cent to 26,053.90.

From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, NTPC, Power Grid, HCL Tech, Tata Steel, Sun Pharma, Trent and Asian Paints were among the major gainers.

However, Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Mahindra & Mahindra and Maruti were among the laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.68 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.56 per cent.

Sectorally, power index jumped 2.72 per cent, utilities (2.61 per cent), oil & gas (2.55 per cent), metal (1.68 per cent), energy (1.51 per cent), services (1.33 per cent), commodities (1.16 per cent) and capital goods (1.01 per cent).

In contrast, auto emerged as the only laggard.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.23 per cent to USD 64.55 a barrel. *—PTI*

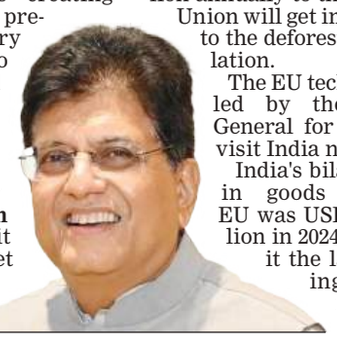
FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

India, EU to continue talks on steel, carbon tax

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

India and the European Union have agreed to continue discussions on issues pertaining to steel, auto, and carbon tax, as these areas carry higher sensitivities, under the proposed free trade agreement, the Commerce Ministry said on Wednesday.

India has also pitched for ensuring redressal of both tariff and non-tariff barriers in the pact, besides creating transparent and predictable regulatory frameworks to boost bilateral trade.



These issues were discussed during Commerce and Industry Minister **Piyush Goyal**'s recent visit to Brussels. He met E U Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic.

The EU has announced regulations such as CBAM and EUDR (Deforestation Regulation), to which India objected.

Under CBAM, Indian exports of steel, aluminium, and cement could face tariffs of 20-35 per cent.

India's exports of products like coffee, leather hides and paperboard worth USD 1.3 billion annually to the European Union will get impacted due to the deforestation regulation.

The EU technical team led by the Director General for Trade will visit India next week.

India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU was USD 136.53 billion in 2024-25, making it the largest trading partner for goods. *—PTI*

Coal India Q2 profit slumps by 32% to ₹4,263 crore

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

State-owned Coal India Limited (CIL) on Wednesday reported a 32 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,262.64 crore for the September quarter, compared with Rs 6,274.80 crore in the same period last year. The drop was largely attributed to lower sales and higher operational expenses.

According to the company's regulatory filing, consolidated revenue fell slightly to Rs 26,909.23 crore, down from Rs 27,271.30 crore a year earlier. Meanwhile, total expenses rose 7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 26,421.86 crore, compared with Rs 24,670.70 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

Coal India, which contributes over 80 per cent of India's total coal output, also recorded a 3.9 per cent decline in production during September, producing 48.97 million tonnes (MT) against 50.94 MT a year ago.

PHOTO: ANI

The production fall came despite the government's broader push to boost domestic coal output and reduce import dependence. Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy attributed the decline to heavy rainfall and waterlogging during the monsoon season, which disrupted mining operations. He, however, stressed that there was no shortage of coal in the country.

Industry analysts noted that monsoon-related challenges often create significant operational difficulties, leading to temporary drops in production.

Looking ahead, the coal major has set an ambitious production target of 875 million tonnes and a dispatch target of 900 million tonnes for FY2025–26. *—PTI*

'India to meet 2032 power demand sans new coal plants'

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

India does not need any new coal power plant beyond those already under construction to meet its electricity demand by 2032, according to a recent study.

The report by a global energy think tank, Ember, warned that adding more coal capacity would be uneconomical and could burden power distribution companies and consumers with higher tariffs as renewable energy and storage become cheaper and more reliable.

The analysis, titled "Coal's Diminishing Role in India's Electricity Transition", said India can meet its 2032 power needs through solar, wind and energy storage targets already set under the National Electricity Plan (NEP) 2032.

If these renewable and storage targets are met, about 10 per cent of additional coal units will remain completely unused by 2031-32, while nearly a quarter of the fleet will be heavily underutilised. *—PTI*

SEBI proposes sharp cut in brokerage feet

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed major reforms to the mutual fund (MF) fee structure, including the introduction of performance-linked expense ratios that would allow fund houses to charge variable fees based on scheme performance.

The proposal, outlined in a consultation paper, aims to align fund manager incentives with investor returns and enhance cost transparency across India's Rs 75 lakh-crore MF industry. The model would be voluntary, with detailed guidelines to be finalised after industry consultations.

SEBI also suggested a steep cut in brokerage and transaction costs, proposing to reduce caps from 12 basis points (bps) to 2 bps on cash trades and from 5 bps to 1 bp on derivatives. The regulator said this would prevent double-charging investors for research bundled into brokerage fees.

Statutory levies such as GST, STT and stamp duty will remain outside expense limits. SEBI has invited public comments on the proposals until 17 November 2025 before finalising the new framework. *—ANI*

Starlink to conduct security demo

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Elon Musk-led Starlink is scheduled to conduct demo runs on 30 and 31 October in Mumbai to show compliance with security and technical conditions for satellite broadband services, sources said.

The demo, to be done before law enforcement agencies, will be based on the provisional spectrum assigned to Starlink, sources told PTI.

PHOTO: ANI

The move would mark a significant step ahead of its planned entry into the Indian satellite broadband market, as these demos are an essential requirement for Starlink to secure clearances before it can launch commercial services.

Sources said Starlink will run a demo to show compliance with the security and technical conditions of GMPCS authorisation. This will be conducted in Mumbai on 30 and 31 October, sources added. *—PTI*

BOAT PARENT AIMS TO RAISE RS 1,500 CR THROUGH IPO

NEW DELHI, 29 OCT

Imagine Marketing, the parent company of wearables brand boAt, has filed updated draft papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 1,500 crore through an initial public offering (IPO).

The company's IPO comprises fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of Rs 1,000 crore by promoters and investors, according to the updated draft red herring prospectus (UDRHP).

As part of the OFS, South Lake Investment will sell shares worth Rs 500 crore, Aman Gupta looks to offload shares worth Rs 225 crore, and Sameer Ashok Mehta will offer shares to the tune of Rs 75 crore.

Investors, Fireside Ventures Investment Fund-I and Qualcomm Ventures LLC -- would sell shares valued at Rs 150 crore and Rs 50 crore, respectively. boAt had filed confidential draft papers with Sebi in April.

The company proposes to utilise Rs 225 crore towards working capital requirements, Rs 150 crore for brand and marketing expenses, and a portion will also be used for general corporate purposes, according to new draft papers. *—PTI*

'Yes Bank lost Rs 2.7K cr due to transaction with Anil Ambani'

MUMBAI, 29 OCT

Yes Bank suffered a loss of over Rs 2,700 crore due to the "unilateral decision" of its co-founder Rana Kapoor to invest in the Anil Ambani-led financial companies, said the CBI's charge sheet in a case pertaining to alleged fraudulent transactions between the bank and the industrialist's group entities.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) last month filed a charge sheet against 13 people and entities, including Anil Ambani, Rana Kapoor and his family members, alleging criminal conspiracy, cheating and corruption related to loans and investments.

The Federal probe agency's document said that further investigation was on regarding the role of Anil Ambani's son Anmol Ambani, the then executive director of Reliance Capital, in the case.

The case is based on two separate complaints lodged by the Chief Vigilance Officer of Yes Bank.

As per the charge sheet, the bank -- when Rana Kapoor was its managing director and chief executive officer -- made investments of Rs 5,010 crore in financial companies of the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani (ADA) Group between 2017 and 2019.

- The case is based on two separate complaints lodged by the Chief Vigilance Officer of Yes Bank.

The investments included Rs 2,965 crore in non-convertible debentures of Reliance Home Finance Limited and 2,045 crore in commercial papers of Reliance Commercial Finance Limited. Out of the total amount, Rs 3,337.5 crore turned Non Performing Investment (NPI) by December 2019, the charge sheet said.

The bank could not recover the entire NPI from the securities against these investments, and thus suffered a loss of Rs 2,700 crores, it said.

The charge sheet mentioned that some entities of ADA were found to be shell companies. *—PTI*

BIGGEST TECTONIC SHIFT

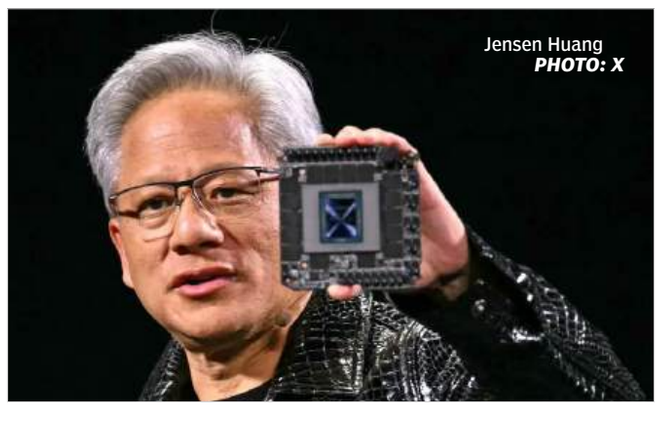
AI chipmaker Nvidia is first $5 trillion company

NEW YORK, 29 OCT

Nvidia is on track to become the first USD 5 trillion company, just three months after the Silicon Valley chipmaker was first to break through the USD 4 trillion barrier.

Hitting the new benchmark puts more emphasis on the upheaval being unleashed by an artificial intelligence craze that's widely viewed as the biggest tectonic shift in technology since Apple co—founder Steve Jobs unveiled the first iPhone 18 years ago.

Apple rode the iPhone's success to become the first publicly traded company to be valued at USD 1 trillion, USD 2 trillion and eventually, USD 3 trillion.



But there are concerns of a possible AI bubble, with officials at the Bank of England earlier this month flagging the growing risk that tech stock prices pumped up by the AI boom could burst. The head of the International Monetary Fund has raised a similar alarm.

- On Wednesday the shares touched USD 207.80 in premarket trading with 24.3 billion shares outstanding, putting its market cap at USD 5.05 trillion.

The ravenous appetite for Nvidia's chips is the main reason that the company's stock price has increased so rapidly since early 2023. On Wednesday the shares touched USD 207.80 in premarket trading with 24.3 billion shares outstanding, putting its market cap at USD 5.05 trillion.

On Tuesday Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang disclosed USD 500 billion in chip orders. The company is also teaming with the Department of Energy to build seven new AI supercomputers.

Last month Nvidia announced that it will invest USD 100 billion in OpenAI as part of a partnership that will add at least 10 gigawatts of Nvidia AI data centres to ramp up the computing power for the owner of the artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Nitish Reddy ruled out of 1st 3 T20Is against Australia

CANBERRA, 29 OCT

All-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy has been ruled out of the first three T20 Internationals against Australia due to neck spasms, the BCCI confirmed on Wednesday. The 22-year-old, who had already missed the third ODI in Sydney with a left quadriceps injury sustained during the second match in Adelaide, developed the fresh issue during his recovery. "Reddy complained of neck spasms, which have affected his recovery and mobility," the BCCI said in a statement, adding that its medical team is closely monitoring his progress. The injury-prone cricketer has struggled with multiple fitness setbacks over the past year, limiting his international appearances. *—PTI*

Oman replaces Pakistan in junior hockey World Cup

LAUSANNE, 26 OCT

The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) informed the International Hockey Federation (FIH) that it will not take part in the upcoming FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Tamil Nadu 2025, despite having qualified for the event through last year's Asia Junior Cup. Following Pakistan's withdrawal, Oman has been invited to participate as the next-highest-placed team from the 2024 Junior Asia Cup. The tournament will be held in India from 28 November to 10 December, 2025, across the cities of Chennai and Madurai. The Indo-Pak relation has deteriorated since the 22 April Pahalgam terror attack and India's subsequent Operation Sindoor. The Indian government recently announced a new policy under which it will not engage in bilateral contests with Pakistan but will continue to compete against them in tournaments. *—ANI*

Inter goalkeeper kills 81-year-old man in car crash

MILAN, 29 OCT

An 81-year-old man in an electric wheelchair has died after being hit by a car driven by Inter Milan goalkeeper Josep Martínez, according to Italian media. The incident occurred near Inter's training centre in Appiano Gentile, outside Milan. Police said the victim may have suffered a sudden illness, causing him to swerve from the cycle path into the road. Martínez, who was driving at the time, and other motorists stopped immediately to help. Emergency services, including an air ambulance, arrived quickly, but the man was pronounced dead at the scene. Martínez was left in shock but uninjured. Inter cancelled coach Cristian Chivu's press conference as a mark of respect. *—PTI*

Early exit for top-ranked Alcaraz at Paris Masters

PARIS, 29 OCT

Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz looked out of rhythm in his 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 loss to unseeded Cameron Norrie in the second round of the Paris Masters. The six-time Grand Slam winner even had an animated discussion with a coach Juan Carlos Ferrero after losing the second set on Tuesday. "I'm really disappointed about my level," Alcaraz said. Norrie sealed victory on his second match point with a strong first serve that Alcaraz returned long. It was his first career win against a No. 1-ranked player. Alcaraz made 54 unforced errors and won only 64 per cent of his first-serve points as he slipped to a third loss in eight matches against Norrie. It was their first meeting indoors. The defeat also ended Alcaraz's 17-match winning run in Masters events and means second-ranked Jannik Sinner will move to the top of the ATP rankings if he wins the tournament. *—PTI*

Rain plays spoilsport in Canberra

Suryakumar Yadav finds some form as India faces Aus in 1st T20I

CANBERRA, 29 OCT

India skipper Suryakumar Yadav returned to form with a sparkling unbeaten 39, but rain played spoilsport as the opening T20 International against Australia was abandoned after persistent showers at the Manuka Oval on Wednesday.

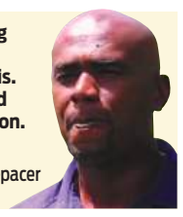
Put in to bat, India reached 102 for 1 in 9.4 overs before play was called off. Suryakumar, showing glimpses of his best after a lean patch this year, struck 39 off 24 balls with five fours and a six. His deputy Shubman Gill was equally impressive, remaining unbeaten on 37 off 20 deliveries. The pair added 62 runs off just 35 balls for the second wicket, steering India into a commanding position before the weather intervened.

Suryakumar, who had managed only 100 runs in 2025 at a strike rate below 110, rediscovered his rhythm, launching Josh Hazlewood over square leg for a trademark six. The Manuka Oval surface, offering bounce and carry, suited his aggressive style perfectly. He farmed the strike early before cutting loose against Nathan Ellis in the 10th over, a square-cut, an elegant off-drive, and a powerful pull over mid-wicket all finding the boundary.

Gill mixed caution with aggression, striking cleanly, including a slog-swept six off spinner Matt Kuhnemann. Earlier, Abhishek Sharma (19 off 14) had given India a brisk start, hitting three boundaries off Xavier Bartlett before mistiming a slower delivery from Ellis to mid-off.

Rain interruptions disrupted the innings twice, with the second spell proving decisive. Between the two stoppages, India scored 54 runs in just 4.4 overs, taking full advantage of slippery conditions that hampered Australia's bowlers. Despite the promising start, the match ended without a result, a frustrating outcome for India, but a confidence booster for skipper Suryakumar as the series progresses. *—PTI*

> **I would like India to have that extra bowling depth and allow the batters to take responsibility, whatever that combination is. With the batting depth of Australia, I would want to have that extra bowling combination. I don't like part-timers in such a big game**
>
> -Ian Bishop, West Indies' ex-pacer



ROHIT BECOMES WORLD'S NO. 1 ODI BATTER FOR THE FIRST TIME

DUBAI, 29 OCT

India's former skipper Rohit Sharma has achieved a major career milestone, becoming the world's No. 1 ranked ODI batter for the first time. The 38-year-old climbed two places in the ICC Men's ODI rankings following his unbeaten 121 in the third ODI against Australia in Sydney, where India cruised to a nine-wicket win. Rohit's 33rd ODI century, featuring 13 fours and three sixes, came alongside Virat Kohli's unbeaten 74, sealing an emphatic series finish.

Rohit overtook Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zadran and India's Shubman Gill to claim the top spot, cementing his place among the game's modern greats after spending much of the past decade inside the top 10.

All-rounder Axar Patel also gained in the latest rankings, rising six places to 31st among ODI bowlers and moving up to eighth among all-rounders following his strong performance in Sydney.

Among bowlers, New Zealand's Mitchell Santner climbed to fourth, while Australia's Josh Hazlewood rose to eighth. England's Harry Brook jumped 23 places to 25th among ODI batters. *—PTI*

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

India to be tested against Aus in semis

NAVI MUMBAI, 29 OCT

Alive in the tournament by a touch of fortune, hosts India will search for a spark of magic reminiscent of skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's legendary knock eight years ago as they take on the mighty Australia in a blockbuster Women's World Cup semifinal on Thursday.

Kaur's 115-ball 171 not out at Derby, England, in 2017 semifinal against Australia was a seminal moment which catapulted women's cricket from the footnote to the headlines.

For a team that has flirted with inconsistency, Thursday's game offers India a chance to defeat one of sport's most dominant sides. India's campaign has been as taxing as it can be for a World Cup host, especially when the team had its back pressed firmly against the wall following three defeats on the trot, from which they fought back to find a place in the semifinals. But then they lost a key batter in Pratika Rawal to injury.

There is no room for error now as India are left in the ring with each of those opponents who had outmatched them in league meetings. The inclusion of the big-hitting Shafali Verma, who was neither in India's plans nor among the six reserve players, indeed adds more fuel to the fire.

Additionally, should India stick with left-arm spinner Radha Yadav, who was brilliant on the field and accurate in her bowling as shown against Bangladesh, particularly when pitted against Sneh Rana who has given away 201 runs in the last three matches for one wicket. A lot would also hinge on Smriti Mandhana, who has played a lead role in India's pursuit for their maiden World Cup title across formats with 365 runs at 60.83 with one century and two fifties, topping the batting charts with a dominant show in recent matches. *—PTI*

For a team that has flirted with inconsistency, Thursday's game offers India a chance to defeat one of sport's most dominant sides *PHOTO: PTI*

England's players celebrate the wicket of New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra during their T20 cricket match in Hamilton, New Zealand, on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Kiwis win 2nd ODI as England's top order fails again

HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND), 29 OCT

Another top-order failure saw England dismissed for 175 and New Zealand win the second one-day cricket international by five wickets Wednesday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

England's innings lasted only 36 overs and New Zealand reached the target in 33.1 overs with Daryl Mitchell making an unbeaten 56 and Rachin Ravindra scoring 54. Mitch Santner finished 34 not out. Mitchell also led New Zealand to a four-wicket win in the series-opener on Saturday with an unbeaten 78 after England was bowled out for 223.

One positive for England was the return of fast bowler Jofra Archer, who bowled at pace and took 3-23 from 10 overs. Archer took 1-8 in his first spell of five overs. He averaged 141 kph (88 mph) and seamed the ball sharply, looking fit ahead of Ashes test series in Australia which starts in less a month.

Rachin Ravindra *PHOTO: PTI*

Earlier, New Zealand won an advantageous toss and chose to bowl on a pitch which had been covered in recent days and produced variable bounce, some slow seam movement and even turn later in the innings.

England slumped to 56-6 in the first ODI on Saturday before Brook's 135 lifted them to 233. New Zealand won that match by four wickets. On Wednesday, England was 105-6 when Brook was dismissed by Santner for 34.

"It was disappointing to say the least," Brook said of the loss.

"But we have to come back stronger and better for the third match on Saturday and hopefully get at least one win." *—PTI*

Teen Anahat stuns champion Gilis in Canadian Open

TORONTO, 29 OCT

India's 17-year-old rising star Anahat Singh stunned defending champion and second seed Tinne Gilis of Belgium to storm into the semifinals of Canadian Women's Open squash tournament here.

Unseeded Anahat won 3-0 (12-10, 11-9, 11-9) against her world number 7 opponent in the quarterfinal match that lasted 36 minutes on Tuesday night. The Indian is currently ranked 43rd in the world. This was Anahat's biggest win in her career and first against a top-10 player. She has been in tremendous form in the tournament, a PSA Tour silver level event, having also beaten world number 20 Melissa Alves of France in the pre-quarterfinals. *—PTI*

PANT'S RETURN IN FOCUS AS INDIA A FACE PROTEAS

BENGALURU, 29 OCT

Rishabh Pant's return to competitive cricket after a three-month injury break will be the main focus when India A face South Africa A in the first four-day match at the BCCI CoE grounds from Thursday.

Pant, who sustained a foot injury during the fourth Test against England on 23 July, missed the home series against the West Indies while undergoing rehabilitation. Leading India A offers him the ideal opportunity to regain form and match fitness ahead of the upcoming home Test series against world champions South Africa. The 28-year-old, expected to reclaim his wicketkeeper-batter role from Dhruv Jurel, will aim to fine-tune both his batting and glovework after weeks of practice at the CoE.

MATCH BEGINS AT 9.30AM

The South African bowling attack, apart from off-spinner Prenelan Subrayen, lacks experience and may not pose a major threat, though weather could play spoilsport. Pant will also benefit from keeping to India A spinners Saransh Jain, Manav Suthar and Harsh Dubey as preparation for facing Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav later this season.

Sai Sudharsan, who featured against the West Indies earlier this month, will look to convert starts into big scores at No. 3. The squad also includes Devdutt Padikkal, Narayan Jagadeesan, Khaleel Ahmed and Anshul Kamboj. *—PTI*

> **I am refining quite a lot of my footwork from a technical point of view. But more importantly, I am understanding what a number three player has to do for the team. I am understanding the role better and trying to implement that," Sudharsan said on the eve of the four-day match here.**
>
> -Sai Sudharsan, Indian batsman

Lakshya enters Hylo Open's 2nd round

SAARBRUCKEN, 29 OCT

India's Lakshya Sen produced an impressive display to upset fifth seed Christo Popov of France in straight games and move into the men's singles pre-quarterfinals at the USD 475,000 Hylo Open Super 500 tournament in Saarbrücken on Wednesday.

Sen, the 2021 World Championships bronze medallist and Hong Kong Open finalist, showed fine control and composure to defeat the higher-ranked Popov 21-16, 22-20 in the opening round. He will now face compatriot S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian, who overcame Malaysia's Jun Hao Leong 21-14, 18-21, 21-16 in another hard-fought encounter.

In an all-Indian clash, Kiran George outplayed former world no. 1 Kidambi Srikanth 21-19, 21-11 to move into the next round, where he will meet France's eighth seed Toma Junior Popov, who edged out Harry Huang of England 21-17, 19-21, 21-19.

India also enjoyed encouraging results in women's singles. Unseeded Shriyanshi Valishetty caused a major upset by defeating third seed Line Højmark Kjaersfeldt of Denmark 21-19, 21-12, while Rakshitha Santhosh Ramraj beat Spain's Clara Azurmendi 21-14, 21-16. The two will now meet in an all-Indian second-round clash.

However, Anmol Kharb bowed out after a narrow 24-26, 21-23 loss to Denmark's Julie Dawall Jakobsen. *—PTI*

Lakshya Sen *PHOTO: PTI*

NO MENTION OF XABI

Vinicius Jr apologises for El Clasico outburst over substitution

MADRID, 29 OCT

Real Madrid forward Vinícius Jr has apologised for his angry reaction during last Sunday's El Clásico, where Madrid defeated Barcelona 2-1 to end a four-match losing streak.

The Brazilian was substituted in the 71st minute by manager Xabi Alonso, despite having played a key role in the winning goal and troubling Jules Koundé throughout.

Visibly frustrated, Vinícius stormed straight into the tunnel, shouting, "It's always me... I'm leaving the team." He later returned to the bench but the incident overshadowed Madrid's victory.

Two days later, he took to social media to apologise, writing: "Today I want to apologise to all Madridistas for my reaction when I was substituted in the Clásico. As I have already done in person during training, I also want to apologise again to my teammates, the club, and the president."

Notably, Vinícius made no mention of Alonso in his apology, despite the flashpoint being directed at the manager. He added that his passion "sometimes gets the better of me because I always want to win and help my team," and reaffirmed his commitment to "keep fighting every second for Real Madrid."

Reports in Spain suggest tensions have grown between Vinícius and Alonso since the coach's appointment in May. With Kylian Mbappé's arrival, the 25-year-old's "main man" status has diminished, leading to repeated early substitutions.

Despite the drama, Madrid remain top of La Liga with 27 points, five clear of Barcelona. *—PTI*